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ABSTRACT

The Management Review and Analysis Program (MRAP) provides resources and guidelines for a research library to use in conducting an internal assessment of management practices. The MRAP self-study project has two components: a procedural methodology for conducting the analysis, and a conceptual framework provided to assist in evaluation. The study normally occurs over one year and a second year is generally devoted to the implementation of study results. Participating libraries have access to the program manual, data collection instruments, group development exercises, and other resources including consultation and personal assistance. Experience applying MRAP to library problems provides information on organizational learning and information on common barriers which may limit growth and development of library staff. (CH)

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OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY LIBRARY MANAGEMENT STUDIES

The Staff Development Implications of Management Self-Study

by Duane E. Webster

The Management Review and Analysis Program (MRAP), developed by the Office of University Library Management Studies (OMS) at the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), provides resources and guidelines for a research library to use in conducting an internal assessment of management practices. The primary purpose of this activity is the improvement of library performance. The program is designed to respond to a need for more effective methods for dealing with the organizational problems of research libraries and while it focuses on management issues, the key aspects and major successes of the program relate to the analytical skills and techniques which are developed when staff address these issues.

As a form of management self-study, MRAP has two components: a procedural methodology for conducting the analysis, and; a conceptual framework provided to assist in evaluation. The complexity and inter-relatedness of management functions requires a systems approach to the study of large organizations. The MRAP procedure accomplishes this by organizing the self-study into seven phases with carefully structured and sequenced tasks. The initial phases cover preparation for the study, appointment and orientation of the study team, conduct of an organizational needs assessment, analysis of environmental factors influencing library operations and review and analysis of institutional goals and objectives. The principle work group is the study team, appointed by the library director and representative of various groups and interests within the library.

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Following the initial phases, the study team organizes a series of nine staff task forces to review, analyze and report on the management functions of planning, policies, budgets, management information systems, organization, supervision, staff development, personnel, and executive leadership. Each task force gathers data on the operation of one function, such as the formulation use, and communication of library policies, analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of current practices in that area and makes recommendations for change and improvement.

After completion of the task force activity, the study team integrates the results into a management study report which is descriptive of current practices and prescriptive in recommending new or changed procedures, policies and systems. This report normally groups the recommendations developed by the several task forces into major programs and projects requiring systematic implementation by the libraries' administration. In the past these recommendations have related to issues such as: the role of the library in university instructional, research, and planning programs; clarification of organizational roles and relationships; strengthening leadership and supervisory positions; improving the decision-making processes within the library; improving the use of personnel resources, and; improving the communication efforts of the library. Many of these study reports are available upon request from the OMS.[1]

The study normally occurs over one year and a second year is generally devoted to the implementation of study results. In most libraries 10% to 30% of the staff is directly involved in study team and task force efforts and almost the entire staff contributes to the study via interviews and surveys.

Libraries participating in the program have access to an array of specially designed resources to facilitate efficient completion of the study. The core

instrument in the program is a 400 page manual, which is prepared by the Office and revised on the basis of experience in the several applications of the project.[2] This manual is supplemented by a series of six training sessions conducted by OMS and attended by chairpersons representing participating libraries. Since the application of MRAP generally involves a group of three or more libraries working through the program on roughly the same schedule, these training sessions allow the libraries to share ideas, successes, and problems. More recently, OMS has prepared specialized resources such as data collection instruments, group development exercises, guidelines for task force leaders, and an implementation manual. The Office also provides consultation and assistance to those libraries that participate in the program or are working on implementation of the results of the program. To date 22 ARL members have participated in the program in five applications. With each application refinements have been made in the program as a result of the experience with different libraries, and individual libraries adopt the program to their specific needs. For more information on the development, conduct, or library experience with MRAP contact the OMS for a bibliography of MRAP related references.[3]

Experience with applying MRAP to library problems has provided some perspective on the learning process within an organizational context. Common barriers which frequently limit the growth and development of library staff members seem to include:

- The lack on most library staffs of basic knowledge and skills required for doing this type of study.

- The limits which the workload and staffing levels of most libraries place on the amount of time that can be devoted to planning, development or research efforts;
- Resistance to change is common-place in library organizations, and is characterized by an unwillingness to experiment and a lack of support for fresh ideas or different viewpoints;
- The unwillingness of staff to commit themselves to the difficulties and risks of self-study, because their experience has suggested that large libraries are slow to change and may well retaliate if unique, significant proposals are advanced;
- The ease of criticizing and fault-finding as compared to the objective assessment of strengths and weaknesses and the development of positive proposals for improvements that are implementable; and
- The lack of resources and methodologies for facilitating learning in an organization context.

Our experience indicates that planning for staff development in library organizations begins with an understanding of these barriers and also includes:

- Executive leadership that is commited to the objectives and philosophy of the program.
- Access to the experiences and accomplishments of other organizations including non-library organizations must be available.
- Staff that are willing to test ideas, to experiment with new approaches and to change old practices.

- o The recognition that training has to be related to organizational needs and the results must be valuable to the library, not just to individual growth.
- o The recognition that learning by doing is probably the most cost-effective way of securing change in behavior and acquiring new skills.
- o Recognition of the value of group problem-solving and decision-making as a vehicle for securing a more informed, competent and committed staff.
- o Recognition that a long-term investment is needed ment is needed in order to secure real impact on organization performance.

Conclusion

Libraries are being forced to invest increasing amounts of resources and staff time in concerted efforts to secure change and improvement in the performance of their organizations. Staff development is a critical prerequisite of performance improvement and, as a result, library organizations are assuming responsibility for cost-effective training and developmental efforts.

References

1. Association of Research Libraries. Office of University Library Management Studies. Status of Individual Management Review and Analysis Program Studies. Washington, D.C. Author, December, 1975.

2. Webster, Duane, assisted by Suzanne Frankie. Library Management Review and Analysis Program: A Handbook for Guiding Change and Improvement in Research Library Management. Washington, D.C.: Office of University Library Management Studies, Association of Research Libraries, 1973. This manual is available to program participants only; a brochure describing the program is available from the ARL Office of University Library Management Studies, 1527 New Hampshire Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

3. Webster, Duane, "Bibliography of MRAP related Publications", available from The ARL Office of University Library Management Studies and will be published in a forthcoming issue of The Journal of Academic Librarianship.